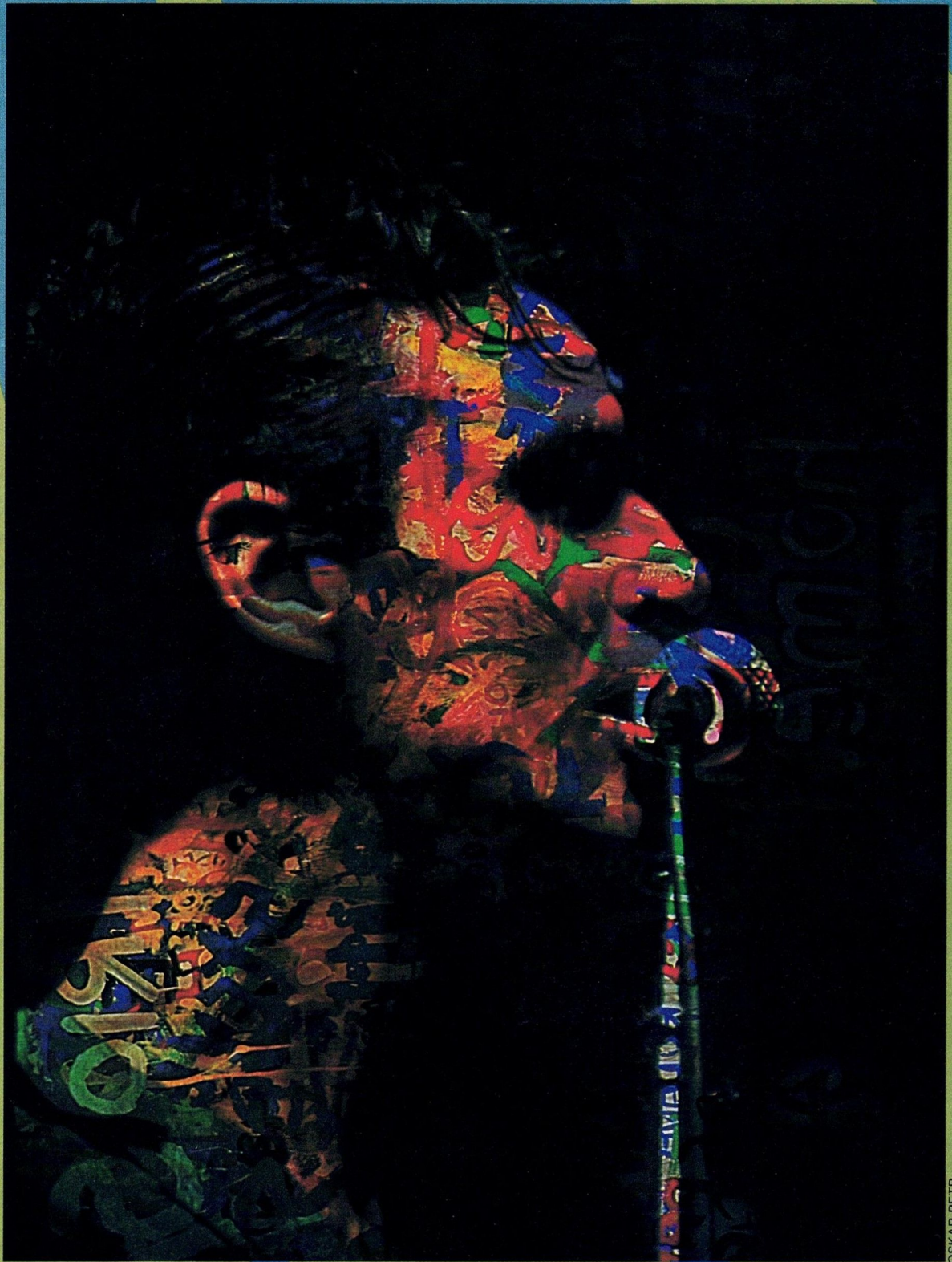


"I defy anyone to find my country-western influences in any Talking Heads song."



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HEAD'S HEAD TALKS

David Byrne Challenges ROCK Magazine Readers

BY CRAIG MODDERNO

Talking Heads had this problem. Considered too Art Pop for the get-down-and-boogie crowd, the band was looking for a single that would bridge the gap between their own fans and the kids who buy "Little Red Corvette." That single was the up-tempo, danceable "Burning Down the House," a number whose rhythms sound more like King Sunny Ade' than like the Heads' early output.

With their current album, *Speaking In Tongues*, on the top 30, it looks like Talking Heads have finally managed to shake the new wave label that has limited their appeal. Besides having a song in the Robert De Niro film *King Of Comedy*, the band has just completed an American tour featuring numerous sellouts. But Talking Heads has refused to sell out themselves, and their leader, David Byrne, remains a head worth talking to.

ROCK: Why is America finally discovering Talking Heads?

Byrne: There are more people doing what we're doing now, so radio here doesn't consider us to be so weird. Radio can play us and Prince, because now they think teenyboppers can dance to our music. It's flattering to be imitated.

ROCK: Are there any artists that you keep in your musical closet?

Byrne: Hank Williams and Patsy Cline. I defy anyone to find my country western influences in any Talking Heads songs. Maybe you might want to run one of your contests about that.*

**Readers are encouraged to accept Mr. Byrne's challenge. Send to David Byrne, c/o ROCK Magazine, Box 1395, Beverly Hills, CA 90212. The five best answers will receive ROCK Magazine T-shirts. Decision of the judges (us) will be final. —Editor*



Byrne: "Many people think I'm from outer space. Actually I'm from New Jersey."

ROCK: How would you describe your music to someone who had never heard it?

Byrne: (Laughs) I would have a hard time doing that. I'm pretty mixed up about our music myself.

ROCK: How important is having a hit single for a new band?

Byrne: It can be a blessing and a curse in disguise. For a new band, it means instant fame and recognition. For *our* band, a hit single meant more people would check out our old albums. If they buy them, then having a hit single was truly a blessing.

ROCK: You hadn't toured until recently. Did you enjoy performing?

Byrne: It was fun. I learned how to rest on my days off. I learned that practically every hotel has a coffee shop in it.

ROCK: What's your creative process in composing?

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Byrne: Not really. That doesn't bother me. Some musicians tend to value technique over melody. I emphasize the texture and overall attitude of the music. Our music is not very complicated, but it's quite rhythm-oriented.

ROCK: Was there a time when you considered another career?

Byrne: I always wanted to be an artist of some sort. When I first heard The Beatles, I knew I wanted to be a musician forever. My parents were very supportive. Maybe they couldn't see me working for a steel mill, either.

ROCK: When you sing in the shower, who are you?

Byrne: A black R&B singer. I don't do that often, because it's hard to do James Brown's act in the shower.

ROCK: When you write a song, are you thinking of how it will play as a video?

Byrne: No. I have a hard enough time figuring out how it will play as a record. I like looking at videos. I think some bands should take acting lessons if they continue to keep making videos.

ROCK: Would you like to compose a soundtrack to a movie?

Byrne: Sure. I just haven't seen any good scripts worth scoring. I'd love to do any of the popular space movies. I can't stand those John Williams scores. They should give the new kids a break. Especially when my fans think I'm out there anyway.

ROCK: Have you ever changed a song after you tried it out on an audience?

Byrne: Definitely. Audience response is usually honest and direct. It's like going out on a first date, and the girl sees you for the first time and screams. You've got to figure at that point that something about you needs to be changed. If that same girl screams seeing you in concert, it could be a positive thing.

ROCK: What are the difficulties in keeping together a band nowadays?

Byrne (laughs): Money! It's the same problem everyone faces. You've got all these people that you've got to support. We've worked out a good situation where we can do our own projects and still come back and do Talking Heads records.

ROCK: Were you pleased with the album that you produced for the B-52s?

Byrne: I quite like it. The album wasn't that successful but it's a good record. I enjoyed producing the Fun Boy Three record. Producing records is fun for me. I can be involved vicariously in music that's not my own. It's a vacation for me to produce another band but it's no picnic.

ROCK: Have you ever wanted to produce a band that nobody would expect you'd be interested in?

Byrne: There's a couple of folk acts that I'd like to produce, like Richard Thompson. I've gotten offers from more mainstream artists than myself. What would they want from me production-wise? They're already successful, so I'm not sure how I'd fit in.

ROCK: What do you do in your spare time?

Byrne: I'm not the kind of guy you'd go to a sporting event with. I love to swim. I'm just your average alien kind of guy.